



## Independent Editorial Report

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## FAMILY VIEW

# Toyota Auris

## THE MORE IT CHANGES...

**...the more it stays the same? Toyota had a world best seller in their Corolla family hatchback. June Neary checks out its replacement, the Auris**

### A Family View - Will It Suit?

More than any model before it, Toyota's latest Auris is on a mission to be all things to all people; well most things to a lot of people would be more accurate. This car has the unenviable job of replacing the company's Corolla, a world best seller in the tightly-fought family hatchback segment. Since its introduction in 1966, over 30 million Corollas found homes around the world. A staggering number.

The Auris is unlikely to replicate those kinds of sales but it might well be an even more significant model for Toyota in the UK where the Corolla was never a huge seller. The Auris aims to lower this model's average ownership age with a more dynamic look and feel as well as a series of practical features designed to help Toyota poach sales from other marques in the Focus and Astra-dominated family hatchback sector.

My first impression was that the car was a facelifted Corolla, but upon closer inspection, I found that the style and design changes were far-reaching. After a day or two, the shape began to really grow on me – to the point where I now regard the Auris as one of the best looking cars in this part of the market. In a sea of mundane-looking family hatches, that's a great selling point.

### The Practicalities

Toyota's family hatchbacks have always been eminently practical propositions. The old Corolla was probably the greatest exposition of the car as an example of white goods: unexciting, utterly reliable and representing the classic 'low involvement' buying decision. Basically, it was a vehicle bought by people who had no interest or affection for cars.

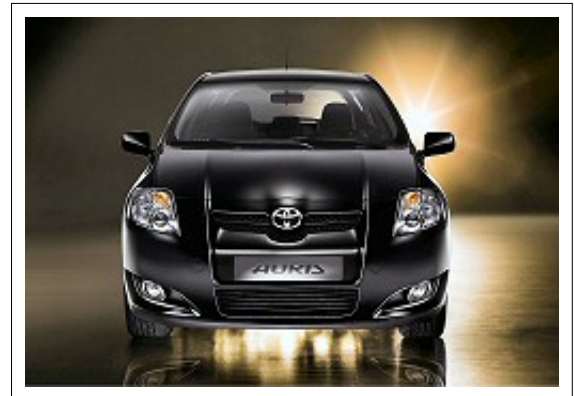
The Auris aims to keep its predecessor's sensible virtues but at the same time, step out into the realms of desirability. In creating it, Toyota's engineers started with the passengers and then worked outwards, maximising occupant space with elements such as a flat passenger floor and high window surfaces. The car shares none of its underpinnings with the Corolla, instead being built on an all-new platform with an overall length of 4,220mm incorporating a 2,600mm wheelbase. This means that the wheelbase represents 61.6 per cent of the car's total length. The higher the percentage, the more space is afforded to people rather than oily bits.

By contrast, the current Ford Focus, a model which is generally seen as an exemplar of smart packaging in this class, has a 58.5 per cent wheelbase to length and even something like the latest SEAT Leon manages a mere 59.7 per cent figure. With an overall height of 1,515 and a width of 1,760mm, the Auris is one of the biggest family hatches around, although the shape does much to disguise this bulk.

I thought the build quality to be impressive – easily up to the standard set by the class-leading Volkswagen Golf. The cabin features silicone-damped grab handles, soft-touch plastics on the fascia and doors that say thunk rather than ding when they close. Closer inspection showed little evidence of corner cutting. It's easy to obtain a comfortable driving position and the sheer ease and intuitiveness of all the minor controls is a testament to Toyota's understanding of how we interact with a car. There are no awkwardly located buttons that will have you fumbling around in the dark for or storage areas that will fling an apple Danish into your lap at the first twitch of the steering wheel.

### Behind the Wheel

Both three and five door bodystyles are offered along with a range of five engines. The two petrol engines comprise a 96bhp 1.4 VVT-i unit and a 122bhp 1.6-litre Dual VVT-i powerplant that raises fuel efficiency and power output compared to the Corolla's 1.6-litre mill. Diesel buyers get to choose from three engines. The entry-level lump is the 1.4-litre D4-D, good for 89bhp. Customers then step up to a 2.0-litre D4-D 130 engine





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which despite its name has a power output of 124bhp and was first seen in the 2007 Avensis. Given that it drove this hefty car around with ease, it should make an Auris respectably brisk.

At the top of the range is the 2.2-litre D4-D 180 which churns out 175bhp and is one of the best compact diesel engines around, offering fully 36bhp more than its 2.2-litre diesel rival, the Honda Civic. Six speed manual transmissions are fitted as standard to the two more powerful diesels but a MultiMode system with paddle shifters is offered as an option for the 1.4-litre D4-D90 and the 1.6-litre Dual VVT-i engines.

The 1.6-litre engine in the car I tried was certainly spirited, although recourse to the manual was required to establish what VVT-i stood for. Suitably enlightened, I can now explain in great detail how it varies the valve timing by shifting the phase angle of camshafts. For example, at high speed, the inlet camshaft will be rotated in advance by 30° to enable earlier intake. This movement is controlled by engine management system according to need, and actuated by hydraulic valve gears. Armed with this fascinating snippet of knowledge you will also be able to berate motoring TV show presenters as they change up just as the camshaft is about to do its 30 degree thing. Guaranteed to intimidate any couchbound husband.

Otherwise, the Auris is much as you would expect on the road. It handles tidily, safely and competently, but the ride is better than many in its class. Even the range topping 175bhp D-4D 180 version won't have you searching out a sports bra every time you get behind the wheel.

### **Value for money**

With prices starting from around the £12,000 mark, the Auris isn't going to send the Neary family bank balance to the wall, and it stacks up reasonably against its competitors. Reliability is virtually assured, and there's always a ready market when it comes to resale time. As with any upspec car, the plushest versions won't perform as well when it 's time to sell on as a cheaper Auris model, but you'd live with that for all the additional equipment it comes with.

### **Could I Live With One?**

Most definitely. The Auris has just the sort of practical attributes I like without being so bland that it extinguishes the will to live nor so racy my neighbours will think I've just divorced the old man. More of the same then from Toyota, but with an added - and very welcome - sparkle.